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ABSTRACT

How best to prepare beginning tachers and what is meant by an adequately prepared teacher are issues that directly influence the structure and practice of teacher preparation programs. A critical review of recent research (1978-1988) on social studies methods classes, examined those with a focus on overall course design and those that focus on a specific practice. The studies cited did not contribute to a knowledge base in the empirical-analytic sense, and most of the work reviewed was based on the researchers' own teaching experiences. Research on particular components of social studies methods classes was particularistic and unsystematic with little building of one study upon another. There was no pattern to the data on the characteristics of the effective social studies methods classes. Samples were randomly selected from too narrow a population, jeopardizing the validity of generalizing to a wider population. None of the studies examined whether changes in attitudes had an impact on teaching practices. Recommendations for further study include developing alternative approaches to research, with the focus on intrapersonal processes and self-reports that can be a valid component of a broader set of research practices. Researchers must conduct a critical inquiry that questions, analyzes, and considers alternatives. (NL)

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES METHODS COURSE INSTRUCTOR: PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES METHODS COURSE INSTRUCTOR: PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

University faculty directly involved with the education of teachers daily face the challenges of "practice." Questions of how best to prepare beginning teachers, including what it means to be an adequately prepared beginning teacher, are not simply theoretical issues. These are issues which directly influence the structures of and the practices within teacher preparation programs.

Teacher educators do not work alone, however; they are a part of a community of scholars and practitioners, who in their research and in their teaching struggle with the questions embedded in the effort to create and implement appropriate and effective teacher education programs. Within this community, practice and research are, or ought to be, inextricably linked and shared with the community. It is hoped that practices in teacher education are informed by research and that researchers respond to the problems and issues of practice.

For those interested in the education of social studies teachers, it is appropriate to ask what can be learned from research about teacher education and, more specifically, from research on the social studies methods class -- the one component of teacher preparation programs which is designed specifically to prepare teachers of social studies. What follows is a review of and reaction to recent (1978-1988) research on the social studies methods class.

Research, and the review of research, on the social studies methods course ought to add to our knowledge of what constitute effective and promising practices in the teaching of this course. One might hope that a review of research would provide generalizations about social studies methods instruction and course structure, about long term as well as short term gains, for example, and would point toward theories which would guide those responsible for the education of social studies teachers.

A review of research ought to identify common and promising practices in the research on social studies methods courses and look toward what needs to be known. What questions have researchers not asked, or only begun to ask? What new questions and approaches hold promise for extending our knowledge about social studies teacher education and improving our practices? How are we conducting research and how might we conduct research? This review aims to point in new directions, toward new questions and new methodologies, as well as to synthesize work already done.

Research Review

Articles and papers reviewed include those with a focus on overall course design and those which focus on particular practices. Studies which were pimarily descriptions of practice or course design are included, along with the more traditional experimental and survey approaches, since each has the potential to contribute to our knowledge about social studies methods

classes and to improve practice. The work on overall course design will be discussed first.

Methods Course Design and Structure

The research on methods course design and structure has explored a variety of possibilities. The greatest research emphasis has been given to field-based methods courses. Dibella and Fitzgerald (1982) described the experience of integrating field work into the methods class by assigning preservice teachers enrolled in social studies methods to teach a unit of study once a week over a period of nine weeks. Student and faculty responses on a questionnaire indicated that the program had been successful.

Merwin and Templeton (1978) reported the findings of a study in which three groups, made up of students enrolled in social studies methods classes at one institution, were used to evaluate the efficacy of Self-Instructional Modules (SIMs) developed by the author. Efficacy was measured by the author's observations of the students' teaching in their field placements. Students who experienced the SIMs in conjunction with a field-based methods course were rated most highly; those who used the Modules along with the conventional methods class were also rated highly; those who did not use the modules were rated last. No group experienced the field based course without the use of SIMs.

Foster (1979), Phillips (1979) and Staton-Spicer, Colson, and Bassett (1979) each described a different perspective on a collaborative program which emphasized field work during methods

courses in order to facilitate the application of theory to practice. Van Cleaf, Schroder, and Frataccia (1980) examined the effects of varying amounts of time allocated to experience with children on the participating preservice teachers' perceptions of the value of various components of their methods course. Interestingly, those who had spent the most time with children as part of their methods course (30% of the time) ranked that component of the course least important. Those who had spent less time (from 2.5 to 5% of their time) ranked that experience as most valuable. During student teaching, however, the group that had spent more of their time in the early field experience ranked that experience as more valued. The authors assumed that student perceptions, as measured by a survey instrument with Likert-scale items, are an important factor in determining whether the balance between course work and field experiences is appropriate.

Despite a common topic, a synthesis of these studies and the data offered did not allow for any general conclusions. Positive results are claimed in each of these reports; that is, it would seem that field based methods classes help to better prepare teachers. However, the data which support these assertions are generally superficial, based on questionnaires and observers' impressions. Importantly, researchers have not investigated the effects of field experiences on the preservice teachers' long term development in teaching.

Articles that described overall course design, other than

those studies which focused on field-based programs, covered a variety of often unrelated ideas. Metzger (1985) presented a rationale for increasing the number of required hours for the social studies methods course, along with a description of expanded courses. However, he provided no empirical evidence that students actually gain from this expanded experience. Herman (1982) argued that methods courses can be improved through the development of closer relationships with schools. Data from schools describing what school people believe methods courses ought to include can be helpful to methods instructors, the author argued, in identifying the competencies needed in the real world of classrooms. Hoffman (1979) presented a description of a social studies methods class designed to make the class more personal and allow for a mutual sharing of ideas and interests.

For the most part, these authors described course structure and presented little systematic evidence to support their recommendations. Although some rationale is given for each idea, by and large there is little attention paid to any theoretical base. Hoffman (1979) made mention of developmental theory in arguing for the importance of modelling trust and rapport; nonetheless, he made no systematic effort to apply a particular theory to teaching the methods course.

A different approach to the discussion of overall course design was represented by the work of Goodman (1984), Adler and Goodman (1986) and Ross and Hannay (1986). These authors discussed attempts to base a methods course on theory and

rationale by applying the work of critical theorists to the teaching of methods courses. The studies were primarily descriptive and did not include assessment of outcomes; there was no assessment of the ways in which students were actually changed by their participation in the course or whether those changes were reflected in their eventual classroom teaching. However, while these reports were not empirical in nature, they did represent a systematic approach toward applying theory to practice and suggest a direction for future research.

The work described above focused on methods classes in general; the more common approach found in research on the social studies methods class was to examine particular assignments or elements of the methods course.

Components of the Methods Course

Several authors discussed ways in which they incorporated issues of ethnic and gender diversity into the methods class. Carlson (1986) discussed the use of video discs to increase preservice teachers' understanding of cultural diversity. A survey, "Understanding Cultural Diversity," and the author's observations were presented to support the technique discussed. Bennett (1979) described a variety of class activities in a secondary methods class, labelled an experimental group, designed to change preservice teachers' perceptions of racial and cultural groups. He contrasted this approach with what he described as the more traditional competency-based approach of another class,

the control group. In this study, the author reported that responses to survey instruments did indicate some statistically significant positive changes in experimental groups' perceptions of ethnic groups.

Smith (1978) studied the effects of materials he developed to help elementary preservice teachers investigate their own attitudes toward gender and gender roles. While there was no statistical difference between the non-randomly assigned experimental and control groups on the posttest attitude survey administered in this study, the author argued that the experimental group did show a greater willingness to develop nonsexist lesson plans with regard to family roles and careers.

It is no surprise that the instructors of social studies methods classes should address issues of ethnic and gender diversity; these are topics which seem natural to social studies. What is surprising is what is not included in this research. Given the changing demographics of the school age population, one would hope that research on social studies teacher education will, in the future, include reports on efforts to prepare white, middle class teachers to teach social studies to students of diverse ethnic backgrounds and from poverty homes.

Other studies on strategies for teaching methods classes range over diverse approaches. The emphasis was on the description of practices, with some data presented to support the particular thesis. Weaver, Gardner, Williams, Cole, and Saracho (1984) and Kincheloe (1985) described ways of using

community resources and getting preservice teachers involved in doing primary source research. In the Weaver et al. report, students enrolled in one methods class were used as an experimental group, while students in another class were used as a control. While the description of the teaching strategy used was informative, the measures used to compare the two groups were unclear. The Kincheloe report included a description of a student research project and a report on its observed success; the author did not make clear what evidence for success was used.

Marsh (1983) presented the results of a survey of Australian social studies methods professors in which 58% of the respondants indicated that teaching preservice students to develop criteria for the selection of curriculum materials was very important. However, on the same survey a majority of respondents reported using less than 20% of their course to involve students in such activities. The author concluded that this is insufficient time, and that, despite its perceived importance, little emphasis is given by methods instructors to teaching students to develop criteria for selecting curriculum materials.

Ellington (1985) described the practice of having preservice teachers interview practicing teachers and thus gain insight into teaching while at the same time learning an important skill. Student comments and course evaluations were presented to support the usefulness of the activity. Walton, Kutz, and Thompson(1986) discussed the use of Carl Sagen's "Cosmos" during the methods class as a vehicle to demonstrate and

promote integrated curricula for the schools. A questionnaire and observations of small group discussions about the theory, applications, and benefits of an integrated curriculum were used to assess students' reactions, seen as positive, to the approach.

Freeland (1983) divided students enrolled in social studies methods courses into an experimental group (n=45) which used self instructional modules to teach about the social sciences and a control group (n=55) which used the textbook to teach the same topic. Results from pre- and posttests, according to the author, indicated that those using the self instructional modules learned more of the desired content. Lee (1984) described a process used to help students learn power-sharing and decision-making skills and included a discussion of student reactions to the experiences.

Research on the particular components of social studies methods classes has been, on the whole, particularistic and unsystematic. Robinson's (1982) assertion that there is little cumulative impact to this line of inquiry still holds; there is little building of one study upon another. A review of this research provides the reader with some interesting ideas that might be tried in his or her own teaching; but there is no pattern to the data or development in the research which increases our knowledge about the characteristics of the effective social studies methods classes.

<u>What Does Research Tell Us?</u>

Thus, research on social studies methods courses conducted

in the period 1978-1988 ranged widely, but not deeply, over an array of topics. Some of these studies (Foster, 1979; Herman, 1982; Hoffman, 1979; Metzger, 1985; Phillips,1979; Staton-Spicer et al, 1979) were simply descriptive pieces, detailing the implementation of particular practices or orientations. Although not systematic in their discussion of outcomes or in the connections they made with one another, the reports can be useful in stimulating ideas for individual readers who, themselves, teach methods courses.

Other studies were more empirically grounded. Among these were studies which used data gathered through questionnaires, surveys, or observation of the preservice students involved (Carlson, 1986; Dibella & Fitzgerald, 1982; Ellington, 1985; Kincheloe,1985; Marsh, 1983; Walton, Kutz & Thompson, 1986). Still other efforts (Bennett, 1979; Freeland,1983; Merwin and Templeton,1978; Smith, 1978; Van Cleaf, Schroder, and Frataccia, 1980; Weaver et al., 1984) used experimental research design in the natural settings of teacher education programs. However, claims to the validity of these studies were weak when measured against the standards for experimental research (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Samples were randomly selected from too narrow a population or not randomly selected at all, jeopardizing the validity of generalizing to a wider population. The internal validity of these studies was not clear; changes documented may have resulted from any one of a number of factors. A change in attitude as measured by a survey instrument administered by a

methods class instructor, for example, may have been the result of knowing what the professor wanted. Further, the researchers did not build upon or make reference to related research; rather, they tended to be ahistorical in their approach.

None of the studies discussed above examined whether changes in attitudes and/or knowledge had an impact on the teaching practices developed by the preservice teachers under study. Did the strategies used in methods classes and described in these studies make any difference to the teaching of social studies? Further, research on social studies methods classes did not examine the relationship of the methods class to the broader education program of which it is a part. Decontextualizing the elements of teacher education under study is a common problem in research on teacher education generally (Zeichner, 1985). Does it matter,for example, whether students take the methods class at the graduate or undergraduate level? Are there any meaningful differences when the same strategies in a methods class are used in a small program or a large one, at a small college or a large university? How do the expectations from other courses, both implicit and explicit, influence what is learned in a methods class?

Finally, little attention was paid to how participants, including the researchers, structured the meaning of tasks or how the contexts of those tasks influenced those meanings and shaped intentions and practices.

Methods Instructor as Practitioner Researcher

As argued above, it cannot be said that the studies cited contribute to a growing knowledge base concerning the social studies methods class, at least in the traditional empirical-analytic sense. But perhaps we have restricted our view of what it means to know and understand something (like a methods class) and how we might go about knowing and understanding. Quantitative, experimental studies can contribute to our knowledge of methods classes when carefully designed, and when placed in a context of related theory and research. But this is only one framework for study and as such is limiting (Cornbleth, 1985). Among those interested in methods courses are those who teach those courses, and these are often not the people involved in large-scale research projects. In fact, the nature of the research discussed above suggests that most of the researchers cited were describing their own teaching experiences, not running large scale research studies. Too often, the methods class practitioner has neither the time nor the resources to conduct well-designed experiments. Teacher educators are practitioners, who, while often limited in time and resources, can reflect on their own practices and contribute to a body of literature that reflects a "wisdom of practice."

Shulman (1986) writes that we conduct research in order to make sense of something, to get smarter about something and/or to improve in the performance of something. Those who are closely involved with teaching the methods class seek, for a variety of

reasons, to share that experience in some sort of public forum, as scholars as well as practitioners. However, in the public sharing of our experiences of practice, we tend to distance ourselves from those experiences, most often through a reliance on experiemiental form. Yet such a form has failed to contribute to our understanding of practice through the development of law-like generalizations and predictability. At the same time, the language of experiemental or quasi-experimental form impedes the possibility of enriching our understanding of practice through thoughtful sharing. There are many ways of knowing, analyzing and explaining. The teacher educator, as practitioner, would do well to seek ways more appropriate and purposeful.

Rather than separate the knower and the known, research on teacher education can look to a knowledge base developed from practice, ..." continually being created and interpreted, especially by practitioners..." in their particular situations (Diez, 1987). Pinar (1976) writes that to explore and understand educational experiences we must exist in them, rather than removing ourselves from them. The work of practitioner researchers need not be aimed at building timeless generalizations; rather, such researchers can develop and utilize alternative approaches to research which may enable methods class practioners to make informed choices about the nature and activities of their classes.

A focus on intrapersonal processes, introspection, and self-reports can serve as a valid component of a broader set of

research practices (Allender, 1986). Reflection on one's own practice, done systematically and thoughtfully, can contribute to an accumulation of knowledge about the social studies methods class. The charge to teacher educators, is to develop ways to reflect upon our experiences of practice and our inner worlds of meaning from that practice in ways that are publicly meaningful. It may be instructive, then, to look at the studies cited above for some examples of possibilities.

Some of the studies (Adler & Goodman, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Lee, 1984; Little, 1984) of methods classes described above were more self-consciously reflective. These authors explicitly examined their own involvement as practitioners of teacher education. Each included a description of the problems the authors encountered as they sought to implement their particular ideas. Little's (1984) study was explicitly "dedicated to an introspective analysis" (p.1) of his work to implement social studies methods courses within the particular demands of two thematically different teacher education programs at Michigan State. In the other studies as well, the authors attended to the ways in which the particulars of context and situation influenced the practice of methods courses.

Asking that teacher educators become reflective practitioners is to borrow an idea that is permeating teacher education. Despite the variety of meanings given to the notion of reflective practitioner (Adler, 1990), the work of Zeichner and others is instructive here. Becoming a reflective

practitioner means, in the sense in which Zeichner uses the term, becoming skilled in critical inquiry. Critical inquiry, in turn, involves questioning that which is otherwise taken for granted. It involves looking for unarticulated assumptions and seeing from new perspectives. The area of the problematic moves beyond the immediate situation into an awareness of ethical and political possibilities. Critical Inquiry involves a concern with making decisions about teaching and learning based upon perceived ethical and political consequences and a thoughtful awareness of alternatives. In short, critical inquiry means questioning, deciding, analyzing, and considering alternatives within an ethical, political framework.

Conducting a "critical inquiry" into one's own teaching practice means first rendering one's experience into words and connecting that experience with the knowledge and theory in the field to which it relates. Meaningful inquiry in this sense, must avoid the ahistoricism and decontextualization that plagues much work in social studies teacher education. Critical inquiry is more than introspection, it is a way of building on, contributing to, the communal understanding and development of, in this case, social studies teacher education.

Second, critical inquiry involves searching out patterns or anomolies, seeking meaning from the experience as it relates to our knowledge of teaching and learning, of schools and institutions, and of our society and culture. Finally, critical inquiry must involve a sharing, connecting with the experiences

of others. What are the common experiences, problematics, directions and understandings. This means moving past what we think we know, the taken for-granted assumptions, to ask again what we are learning.

We ask our students to become reflective practitioners. But in our own practice, we divorce ourselves as practitioners, seeking to understand and improve upon what we do in the classroom day by day, from ourselves as researchers, seeking to contribute to a general body of knowledge in a publicly accepted form. But the practitioner researcher can bring other perspectives to the field, particularly the thoughtful description of and reflection upon practice.

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